

Two New Fire Trucks and Safety Equipment Will Provide Fire Protection to Lee County (Aug 29, 2006)

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN RICK BOUCHER

Dedication Ceremony for New Vehicles and Equipment for Thomas Walker and Pennington Gap Volunteer Fire Departments

August 29, 2006

Ewing, Virginia

I am pleased to visit Lee County today to celebrate the arrival of two new fire trucks and new safety equipment, all of which have been purchased using federal funds which I secured last year from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency, for two of the County's volunteer fire departments. These additions to Lee County's emergency response resources will benefit residents and businesses located in Ewing, Rose Hill and the surrounding areas in Western Lee County and the Town of Pennington Gap.

Each year, I participate with a number of emergency response organizations in the effort to obtain the federal funding necessary to protect their members. Last year, over \$3.5 million was awarded to over forty fire departments, rescue squads, and police and sheriffs offices in the Ninth Congressional District by the federal government. These funds were used to purchase items including police vehicles, fire trucks, ambulances, turn-out gear, and communication devices. Nearly every community in the Ninth District has benefitted from the federal assistance provided to Southwest Virginia's emergency responders.

In times of emergency, members of our local fire departments respond rapidly and efficiently to provide our first line of defense. These individuals, many of whom serve on a voluntary basis, are generous members of our society who risk personal safety for the public good. In order to continue this vital work, it is only fitting that Southwest Virginia's fire departments have access to the best equipment and training possible.

Today, I am pleased to join the Thomas Walker Volunteer Fire Department and the Pennington Gap Volunteer Fire Department to celebrate the departments' success in obtaining the equipment necessary to protect the residents of Lee County.

Thomas Walker Volunteer Fire Department #1 has purchased two new vehicles using federal funding which I secured. In early September 2005, I announced that the U.S. Department of Homeland Security through its Assistance to Firefighters Grant program was providing federal funding in the amount of \$213,750 to the department for the purchase of a new combination pumper-tanker fire truck. Only two weeks later, I announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture through its Rural Development Agency would provide an additional grant in the amount of \$41,250 to the department for the purchase of a small brush truck.

The new pumper-tanker we see today replaces a 400 gallon, outdated pumper truck previously used by the department. The new truck has five times the water storage capacity, with a 2000 gallon tank for water storage. Additionally, the truck has a 1250 gallon per minute pumping capacity, which will increase the department's firefighting capabilities. The total cost of this vehicle was \$225,000. In addition to the \$213,750 provided by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the department contributed the additional \$11,250 necessary to purchase the truck.

The second truck we see today is smaller in size but equally as critical to providing fire protection to Lee County. This new brush truck allows the department to fight fires in heavily forested and rough terrain areas that other firefighting vehicles cannot reach. Previously, in order to respond to forest and brush fires, the department had to borrow an older brush truck from Thomas Walker #2. This delayed the department's response to these emergencies.

The total cost of the brush truck was \$55,000. In addition to the \$41,250 provided by the Rural Development Agency, the department has provided \$13,750 as a local match.

Thomas Walker Volunteer Fire Department #1 provides fire protection to the communities of Ewing and Rose Hill, as well as the surrounding areas in Western Lee County. The department is staffed by 27 members, all of whom serve on a voluntary basis.

In addition to the success of Thomas Walker Volunteer Fire Department, Pennington Gap Volunteer Fire Department has purchased new safety equipment with a \$96,638 federal grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. With these funds, the department has purchased fifteen new air packs with spare bottles for its members. A cascade system, or mobile air compressor used to refill air bottles while away from the fire station, has also been purchased. The new air packs will replace the outdated equipment previously used by the department, improving safety for the department's firefighters.

The Pennington Gap Volunteer Fire Department has 21 active members, all of whom serve on a voluntary basis. The department provides fire protection to the Town of Pennington Gap and the Woodway community in Lee County.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize several individuals who have been instrumental in the success we celebrate today.

Chief Steven Jaynes with the Thomas Walker Volunteer Fire Department deserves our recognition today for his dedicated efforts to provide his department's members with the most up-to-date and safe equipment. Chief Jaynes has also worked to ensure that all of Southwest Virginia's fire departments know how to access the federal funding available to them. In March I hosted a Ninth Congressional District Emergency Responders Conference entitled Funding Available to Protect the People Who Protect Us, and Steve was one of the presenters who shared with departments from across the region how his department has formed successful partnerships with the federal government.

I also want to thank Chief James Skidmore and Mike Reuille with the Pennington Gap Volunteer Fire Department for their

outstanding leadership and work to obtain the funding necessary to provide protection the department's members.

I also want to thank the members of the Thomas Walker and Pennington Gap Volunteer Fire Departments, who generously donate their time and risk their lives for the safety of the area's residents.

I want to recognize Sally Hamer, Area Director for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency for the excellent work she has done to secure funding for Thomas Walker Volunteer Fire Department and other fire departments across the region.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the Lee County Board of Supervisors for their support of Lee County's volunteer fire departments.

Finally, I would like to thank my Project Manager, Courtney Lamie, for her persistent and persuasive work in support of these departments.

The arrival of this new safety equipment and these two fire trucks we celebrate today is another step toward our goal to provide Southwest Virginia's emergency responders with the best equipment and training possible. These new items will enhance the safety of the residents of Lee County and the firefighters who protect them.